

The death of the second referendum

On Thursday evening we at last got a vote in Parliament on the People's Vote proposal, recently adopted as Labour policy. It was massively defeated by 334 votes to 85. Labour officially abstained, lacking confidence in their new policy. The majority against was 249 votes. The Peoples Vote campaign now say this was not the proper vote! Isn't it interesting how every time we have a democratic vote which they lose, it does not count. Any vote you have only counts as long as it is the answer they want.

On these numbers even if all remaining Labour MPs had voted for the second referendum it would still have gone down to a substantial defeat. 318 votes is a majority in this Parliament, after deducting 7 Sinn Fein MPs, four tellers for each division and the Speaker and Deputy Speakers. Opposition to a second referendum runs higher at 334, a comfortable margin of 16 over an overall majority of the Commons.

Those in the EU who fondly imagine the UK will be like other countries facing unpopular EU measures and will roll over and hold another referendum to change its mind need to understand this vote. There is no likelihood of this Parliament voting through the complex legislation for a second referendum given the big majority against the whole idea. Brussels can rule that out. One uncertainty dogging the UK has been removed.

If there is no prospect of a second referendum which would be the only way of trying to reverse the first, there is less value in delay from Brussels point of view. They used to say they would allow a delay for an attempt to change the minds of the public but not just for delay's sake. Now they are suggesting they might countenance a long delay to put pressure on MPs to sign up to their penal Withdrawal Agreement. If many people had such an advantageous deal for them on the table they would try hard to get the other losing side to sign it. That is a good reason not to do so.